

## #142 - Living Without Food Rules

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is an episode that comes from the deepest care of you and your personhood. We're going to talk about living without food rules.

You might already be reeling. How on earth is that possible? There are so many food rules! I want us to take the next few minutes to think through what life might look like if there weren't any.

If you are a Patreon supporter - which, real quick - Patreon is a way for you to support this show. You can become a Patron of The Lazy Genius Podcast and keep this podcast going because, if you haven't yet noticed, I don't have ads. That doesn't mean I never will, but at this point, Patreon helps foot the bill for this show and my time in creating it. So you sign up to become a Patron and give three bucks a month which is incredibly helpful even though it might seem really small, and as a thank you for that support, I have a secret show for Patreon supporters called The Lazy Sisters Podcast. My sister, Hannah, and I record one show a month that's a solid hour to an hour and a half long, and we talk about all kinds of things but all with the point of being your sisters and keeping you from bad choices. So we talk about building capsule wardrobes and going to therapy and lighting candles and reading books. There's a lot of laughing because nobody makes me laugh like my sister, and it's also a more unedited, perhaps feisty version of me, which, if you're into that, maybe become a Patreon supporter and get that show.

But I bring it up because on a recent episode of The Lazy Sisters Podcast, it might have been the one from December, I went off a little bit on diet culture. Hannah and I both are on very rich journeys as we separate ourselves from diet culture, and we're both pretty feisty about that journey as we learn and experience freedom from the garbage that culture throws at us about what we eat and how we look. Which is why I'm talking about it today. I want you to have freedom. You might not even know that you don't have freedom, but it would be wrong of me to keep what I'm learning from you in case you need the same permission that I did to be free from diet culture and food rules. And since it's the end of January which is often a very deep pit for many of us as we set all of these resolutions or hopes for getting bikini ready or whatever and maybe it hasn't gone the way we wanted it to and we're down in the dumps about ourselves. I refuse to let you stay there when you don't have to. So be prepared that this Kendra, mad at diet culture Kendra, gets real feisty, so just be prepared for me to get a little preachy. I'm not preaching at you; I'm preaching for you. This is important, and I believe very strongly in its importance which is why I'm giving this topic an entire podcast episode.

So you might be wondering what diet culture actually is, so I'd love to define it for you. Diet culture isn't really about being on a diet. You can technically not be on a diet and still live under the code or beliefs of diet culture. So diet culture is basically a belief system, an ethos that says small bodies are better than big bodies and small bodies are healthier than big bodies. Diet

culture tells us that eating a certain way is the only way to get a small or thin body and therefore a healthy body which is better and more ideal than anything else. So certain foods are elevated as healthy and morally better than others, and bodies certainly are elevated as healthy and morally better than others. There is absolutely a cultural bias around fat people. Fat people are irresponsible, they don't have ambition, they're lazy, they're going to die from all these sicknesses they've brought on themselves because they just don't have discipline, and you guys none of that is true. Our culture has taught us to believe that, but it's just not true.

I could go off on body image and the patriarchy and tons of things and might actually in another episode, but today we're just talking about food rules. There are so many given to us from diet culture, and we can't possibly follow them all, especially because a lot of them contradict each other, right? So many diets restrict so many foods and often different foods. Even things like Weight Watchers that say you can eat whatever have points assigned to each food, communicating that certain foods shouldn't be eaten as much as others. And because we can't possibly trust ourselves to make choices for our own bodies, we need a point system to tell us what's what. You don't though.

I did an episode about sixty episodes ago so over a year ago - crazy, right? - called The Lazy Genius and Healthy Eating. That's episode 81 if you want to listen to it. In that episode, I shared about my experience with what is often called intuitive eating which is basically eating without rules and listening to your body and what it needs. That episode addresses things like intuition versus instinct, why your body is trustworthy, why you need to give yourself more credit than thinking all you'll do is eat ice cream and cheese fries if there were no rules, all of that. It's a good episode. But today, I want to specifically imagine what life would be like without any food rules.

Rules I can think of off the top of my head - sugar is bad don't eat much or any at all, eat mostly plants, carbs are bad, beans are bad, beans keep you full, fill your plate with half fresh food, eat protein at every meal to stay full, fruits are still sugar so limit them, have cheat days so you don't feel like you're deprived, drink a big glass of water to start the day or before a meal to fill you up, eat a handful of nuts before you go to a party so you don't eat as many fried things, avoid brown foods, let's not keep going. Also just so you know, I have on the schedule to do an episode about kids and picky eaters and food rules as it relates to tiny humans, so just so you know that's coming soon. I'm reminded of that because of the rule of finish your dinner if you want dessert kind of thing.

There are so many rules, and we could spend - and might actually spend - hours thinking about them every day. You might not realize how much energy you're putting into trying to follow all the food rules, but you likely are. It's so exhausting because we eat a lot. There are food rules about how to do that. Eat small meals and snacks, give your body at least four hours between eating so that it can go through the right chemical process or digest it all, do fasting, don't eat after 7pm, or whatever. Again, so many rules that rarely work together.

If you start paying attention to how and why you choose to eat and buy and cook what you do, I think you'll be shocked at how many of those decisions are either driven by trying to comply with food rules or feeling like garbage because you broke one. Can I invite you for the next week, I mean even a day, of living without any food rules? I would love for you to try it and see what happens.

Now you're likely wondering if you don't live by any rules, what is your guiding light here? What are you listening to make decisions about what and when to eat? I'm so glad you asked. Your body. You listen to your body. Your body is complex and amazing and different from mine which is why diet culture doesn't work. We all have different bodies and different needs, and no rule applies to everyone. It just doesn't. Your body is smart and on your side. It wants to function well. It wants to be efficient and fuel you to live your best life, and it's going to tell you how to do that.

I've been reading Bill Bryson's book *The Body*, and I have developed such an affection for my body through reading it. The human body is remarkable, the things it does, how it rallies, how it knows what it needs but can deal with whatever we throw at it that it might not need. It's something else really, and it's not just a shell or a machine. Part of your body is also your brain and what comes from your brain, like intuition and desire and excitement and joy. Your body isn't out to get you. Your brain is on your side. That's its default, but if we listen to cultural messages, specifically from diet culture, that have been telling us our entire lives that we need a flat stomach and strong arms and no thigh gap and extra energy to play with our kids that's really a cloak for eating quote unquote healthy foods that still contribute to food rules, if we have been getting these messages for so long and comparing ourselves to an ideal standard our entire lives, seeing anything less than thinness is settling. I mean goodness gracious, our brain has a lot to sort through to get to what's true, to get us to listen to what our body actually needs.

So your intuition, hence the term intuitive eating, is your guide, not food rules. Even the most chill food rules still put morality on food, they still create a hierarchy of what's good and what's not, and they still keep us thinking and second-guessing what our bodies are asking for.

If you were to imagine a day without food rules, what might it look like for you?

I'll just share my day yesterday. Yesterday, I drank my coffee in the morning. I use sugar and heavy cream because it tastes better to me and brings me so much more pleasure in the experience of drinking coffee than if I used Splenda or fat-free half-and-half which I still don't understand how that's a thing. I love coffee with cream and sugar. I love it. It brings me such joy. Now I'm already fairly naturally caffeinated. I have a lot of energy and my brain doesn't stop. I have noticed because my body tells me this, that more than one cup of coffee, especially over the course of just the morning, makes my brain work in a way that doesn't help me. I get a headache, my fingers shake, I can't take a deep breath. My body has told me many times that one cup of coffee a morning is enough. It's not because coffee is bad or I'm trying to limit the amount of dairy or I don't need that much sugar or any of that. No, I drink that one cup that one

way because I like that one cup that one way and because my body has made it clear that more than that cup isn't what it needs or wants.

Now, I used to follow the food rule of always eat breakfast, breakfast is the most important, eat something that will fill you up and make you full longer so you're not snacking in the middle of the morning or whatever. I don't do that anymore. I eat breakfast if I'm hungry for breakfast. Sometimes I'm not. Sometimes maybe the dinner the night before is still doing its thing, or maybe the coffee filled me up. Maybe the amount of sleep I got or how my hormones are doing or any number of things could affect whether or not I feel like eating breakfast, but I don't eat breakfast unless I'm hungry for it. I listen to my body, I feel hunger pains, not anything crazy or growly, just that faint whisper of am I hungry? And if I am, I eat something. And I - this sounds crazy - but I ask my body, what should we have for breakfast? Sure, I have to go on what's in the house and how much time I have, but I always get an answer. Yesterday, I asked my body do we want breakfast? Yes, we do. Cool, what do we want? We want something hearty and filling. I thought okay and looked around the kitchen at what I had. When I saw what I had, my body went ding ding ding we want you to toast those two pieces of bread, cook a couple of eggs, grab a piece of cheese and some bacon you already cooked from the freezer, and we want a bacon egg and cheese sandwich. Thanks so much. So I took three minutes to put that together and then ate it. And it was so satisfying and exactly what my body needed. Was I thinking about having protein to start the day? No. Was I worried about the dairy in the cheese? No. Was I bummed that the bread was white and not whole wheat? Zero percent. Was it turkey bacon? Absolutely not. The only reason we're eating turkey bacon is because we have rules around real bacon.

Also to be clear, I'm not espousing bacon egg and cheese sandwiches as the best breakfast because it gives a middle finger to a lot of healthy eating rules. Not at all! Other mornings I have a smoothie, some I have a pumpkin chocolate muffin, sometimes a hardboiled egg or cereal or again nothing at all. No food is better or worse than another. That's the gift of living without food rules. Just eat what your body is asking for without being overly proud or overly guilty about what that food ends up being.

The next time I eat is when I'm hungry. Generally that's around typical lunch time, and sometimes it's two hours after breakfast. It all depends on what my body needs that day, and that's okay. I just listen and obey. And I want to encourage you again to listen to the episode I already did on healthy eating, mostly so you can think through the difference between intuition and instinct. I know you think that if you just did what your body asked for you'd eat Oreos all day, but I just don't believe that for a second. That's listening to your emotions only which is also fine by the way. Emotional eating is not a big deal in my opinion. Food is emotional. It just is. But if we can stop demonizing the emotion behind, we can enjoy what we're eating and not feel like we're in crisis deprivation mode all the time. Just eat the food your body is kindly asking for and trust that voice. It takes practice, but it's worth it to live without food rules.

So again lunch. I often have a recipe that's on the blog called The Chickpea Bowl. It makes my body and my soul so happy. There's rarely a lunch where I think about what to eat for lunch and

my body is like “no, no chickpea bowl that won’t work.” It’s always a great choice for me which is why I have it almost every day.

I’m not going to keep going throughout the day, but having a life without food rules is so freeing and beautiful. I’ve never felt better physically or mentally, and I’m learning to trust my body and know its signals. For example, I know the feeling in my gut when if I eat that thing or that final bite I’m going to feel gross. That doesn’t mean that whatever I’m eating is bad; it just means my body has had enough for now.

So consider living without food rules for just a day or even a week or more and ignore every food rule you’ve known and simply listen to your body. Giving yourself a short timeframe within which to practice this helps you identify the signals your body is giving you. If you don’t pay attention to her language, you won’t know what she’s saying. And food rules will confuse you and make you think it’s your body when it’s really diet culture. So just listen. Take a little time and listen. Your body is more trustworthy than diet books and food rules. You’re complex and nuanced and specific. Our physical bodies definitely operate in many similar ways, but when you throw in genetics and a ton of other things, we can’t all eat the same way by the same rules. Your body knows best. It really does. So give it a chance to prove that. If there are no food rules, that means you don’t have to binge because cookies aren’t bad or restricted. If you feel like a cookie, eat a cookie. If you eat one and still feel like another one, eat another one. If you eat a third and then feel a little sick or fuzzy, that’s your body saying, “hey, I think three might have been too many. I’ll try and signal you louder next time. Thanks for listening.” Just listen. Your body beats the food rules.

This is such a personal topic with tons of questions, especially if you’re deep in diet culture as we all are, so I want to offer three resources. One is the episode I did over a year ago that I already mentioned. The second resource if you like podcasts is the podcast Food Psych. It’s hosted by Christy Harrison who is a registered dietician, and it is a show that is “dedicated to helping you make peace with food and break free from diet culture.” It’s a great listen, she does interviews and answers listener questions... it’s really great. And the third resource is an Instagram account called @no.food.rules but with a period in between each of those words. So no dot food dot rules. That’s run by Colleen Christensen, and it’s a great account with fantastic graphics about what it means to live with food rules and without them. So many things about diet culture are really nuanced and tricky and we don’t even see how much control they have over us, and Colleen’s Instagram account really shines a light on those nuances as she compares life with food rules and life without.

I realize that I get worked up about this, but it’s not because I’m trying to throw culture under the bus or make you feel badly for liking salad or for wanting to be healthy all this time or for anything at all. I don’t want to feel badly about anything. But what I do think might be happening is that you’re feeling badly about more than you realize because you’re living under food rules, and I want more than that for you. I want you to let go of guilt and shame and confusion and exhaustion around food and your choices. I want you to just live and trust your body. Your body is trustworthy, your intuition is valuable, and food is one way to experience that value and listen

to your body. There are plenty of other ways, too, but this is a great place to start since we eat so often. So try it for a day or for a week and just pay attention to where food rules show up. Maybe you keep eating based on those rules, but just pay attention to how many there are or how often you listen to them. Then maybe you take a day and eat without them and see what happens. I love my life so much more now that I eat without food rules, and I hope you can experience the same thing.

I'm guessing there will be a lot of questions about this, so I'll definitely be on Instagram this Thursday around noon EST to do a live and answer your questions, so join me there @thelazygenius. And I'll have links to all of these resources I've mentioned in the show notes.

Thanks for letting me get preachy. I do it because I love you. So until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and we'll talk more next week.